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Imbach, Jessica

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Ghost Talk in 1936: "Living Ghosts" and "Real Ghosts" in Republican-Era Literary Discourse and the Two *Analects Fortnightly* Ghost-Story Special Issues

說鬼 1936：民國文學話語中的「活鬼」與「真鬼」及《論語半月刊》的兩個鬼故事專號

Jessica IMBACH

Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University of Zurich

蘇黎世大學亞洲及東方研究院

1. Introduction[1]

In one of Shao Xunmei's 邵洵美 (1906-1968) early poems, the later to-be editor of the popular humour magazine *Analects Fortnightly* 論語半月刊 (hereafter referred to as *Analects*), described Shanghai 上海 as a city of topsy-turvy realities, where the fantastic can become truth and the genuine may just as easily serve as a disguise for the false. The poem "Spirit of Shanghai" 上海的幽靈 ends with the ecstatic appeal to the reader: "Come! This place is your grave!" (來吧，此地是你們的墳塋)[2] While the invitation to die in Shanghai gives expression to the city's cosmopolitan appeal, it at the same time conjures up an image of Shanghai as the site of a joyous burial ritual. Here, the grave does not mark the end of life, but rather the dawning of a new age, in which experience is no longer shaped by nature and the cycles of life:

> Here there is no need to be afraid of rainy and cloudy days,
> No need to be afraid of autumn and winter's death, nor of spring's vigor:
> how could summer's fire compare to the heat of passionate lips!
> (此地不必怕天雨，天晴；
> 不必怕死的秋冬，生的春；
> 火的夏豈熱得過昏的心！)[3]

The natural cycle of seasonal change dissolves in a romantic encounter between the "unclimbable celestial buildings up there, / street cars, electric cables and race horse stables down below." (上面是不可攀登的天庭；／下面是汽車，電綫，跑馬廳)[4] While in its tone and imagery the poem presents a rather conventional picture of Shanghai as the epicenter of the modern, the gravesite as the last word in the poem exerts a gravitational pull on the libido-charged cityscape in the preceding lines, which redirects the readers' attention towards the urban underground kept hidden by the electrified image of the modern "on top." Shao Xunmei's decadent brand of modernism, infusing his poetry with images of death and decay, most certainly attuned him to the "dark forces" rising from this subterranean realm of the city, its past, the outdated and repressed, which linger between the lines as a threat to his jubilant expression of the modern city's liberation of desire.[5] It was however much later that he should revisit the relationship between the modern and its dark other, not from the "top", but from the vantage point of the haunting subterranean itself, and not in the medium of

1 Research for this paper was funded with a dissertation grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation.

2 Shao Xunmei 邵洵美, *Hua yiban de zui'e* 花一般的罪惡 [*Flower-like Evil*] (Shanghai: Jinwu shudian 金屋書店, 1928), 48.

3 Ibid., 47.

4 Ibid.

5 For a discussion of Shao's decadent aesthetics, see Jonathan Hutt, "Monstre Sacré: The Decadent World of Sinmay Zau," *China Heritage Quarterly* (June 22, 2010), accessed December 12, 2014, http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?issue=022&searchterm=022_monstre.inc.

poetry, but as editor of the humour magazine *Analects*. In 1936, eighteen years after Zhou Zuoren's 周作人 (1885-1967) famous call for a "human(ist) literature" 人的文學, Shao brought a group of writers and cartoonists together in an *Analects* double special issue to reflect on its possible antinomy: ghost stories 鬼故事. As a subject matter ghosts were, as Shao understood them, in opposition to "human(ist) literature," which he criticized for talking so much about humans "to the point of being boring." (講人也應當講厭了)[6] And as a literary form he viewed ghost stories as particularly suited to conveying "emotions" 情感, where the new novel, as he had already pointed out in another context, remained limited by its own "rationality" 理智.[7] Instead of invoking the more well-known Western genre of the gothic or the Chinese literary conventions of the "anomaly account" 誌怪 (*zhiguai*) and the "marvel tale" 傳奇 (*chuanqi*), Shao proposed to adapt the English "literature of nonsense" for a new Chinese "literature of the absurd" 荒謬的文學 or of "reckless talking" 瞎三話四. Central to his argument is the idea that ghosts do not only make good stories, but that they *are* stories in the sense that, in his view, they always point to some form of injustice or express an uncanny experience — and were thus the ideal vehicle for reimagining the new novel, which Shao found lagging behind popular fiction 通俗文學 in terms of narrative interest. While Shao's attempt to revisit spectral figures and narrative configurations from the vantage point of a new literature would be muted by the soon to follow Sino-Japanese war in 1937, the two special issues on ghost stories give vivid testimony to how ghosts, far from being figures of the past, were set squarely in late 1930s debates on China's modernization and often crystallized within discourses of crises. Topics included the role of the modern (male) intellectual writer, the experience of urban life or more directly politically engaged subject matters such as social inequality and the impending war with Japan. This is not to say that there were neatly defined and homogenous ghost- and human-literature camps. Indeed, these "other" voices often came from within progressive intellectual circles insisting on modernization through cultural renewal. Although many texts could be read as responding to the Western gothic novel[8] or as engaging with classical Chinese ghost writing genres, leading often to generic cross-fertilization, a strict genre focused approach to the *Analects* special issues would therefore be problematic. Not only because Shao explicitly foregrounded content over narrative mode in an effort to differentiate his ideas on modern storytelling and writing from Leftist literary views, but also because in the case of the ghost story the study of genre often segues into readings

6 Shao Xunmei, "Gui gushi" 鬼故事 ["Ghost Stories"], in Shao Xunmei ed., "Gui gushi zhuanhao" 鬼故事專號 ["Ghost-story special issue"], *Analects Fortnightly* 論語半月刊 [*Lunyu banyue kan*] 91 (1936): 940. All subsequent citations of this special issue will be given as "Gui gushi zhuanhao."

7 Shao Xunmei, "Xiaoshuo yu gushi" 小說與故事 ["The Novel and the Story"], *Renyan zhoukan* 人言週刊 [*Hearsay Weekly*] 46-7 (1936): 917, 957. For a critical discussion of the *xiaoshuo* and *gushi* debate in the 1930s see Jiang Hui 蔣暉, "From Lu Xun to Zhao Shuli. The Politics of Recognition in Chinese Literary Modernity: A Genealogy of Storytelling" (PhD diss., New York University, 2008).

8 Shi Zhecun 施蟄存 (1905-2003) had initially promised an introductory piece on the English gothic writer Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873), but eventually decided to write on Chinese ghost fiction in general instead.

of modern ghost fiction as a cultural conservative or bourgeois response to modernization.[9] Applied to 1930s Chinese fiction this would not only be questionable for apparent historical reasons, but also for running the risk of reiterating Chinese leftist critiques of ghost fiction as trivial (ghosts cater to an uneducated readership), symptomatic (ghosts are products of a psychological disorder) or reactionary (ghosts hinder society's development). In fact, writers weary of the didacticism of leftist literature equally tried to set their writings apart from Chinese traditions of ghost writings that justified the supernatural often also, at least in statement, with an educative pretext. The act of "rereading"[10] modern ghost writings is therefore also a corrective intervention into normative accounts of modern Chinese literary history that rather than eschews the relevance of classical and Western writings on the subject matter focuses on the strategies of approaching and appropriating very diverse discourses of the spectral during a time of cultural and political crisis as writers navigated the contradictory literary landscape of the late 1930s.[11] Taking my cue from María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren's perceptive remarks (they make on contemporary cultural theory, but also ring particularly true in the case of modern Chinese ghost writings as a field of textual production diligently excluded by literary historians from the realm of the "modern") that "the ghost [...] invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and, consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined present and future."[12] I will seek to delineate the specific workings of ghostly tropes in visual and textual representations and their respective negotiations with China's cultural and literary modernity, which by the mid-1930s had already institutionalized normative constraints on aesthetic representations of ghosts. What strategies did modern artists adopt when writing/visualizing ghosts? And in which contexts does the spectral accrue distinct significance, or not, as the case may be? Starting with an

9 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1996); Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 2002).

10 I borrow this term from Rey Chow's seminal study "Rereading Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: A Response to the 'Postmodern' Condition," *Cultural Critique* 5 (December 1986): 69-93.

11 One could perhaps even go so far as to attribute this malleability to Chinese genres of ghost writings themselves that have always creatively challenged the boundaries of fiction and history, philosophy and politics, see for example, Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Leo Tak-hung Chan 陳德鴻, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1998). The transformations of specific classical genres in the early modern period as well as their relationship to the short essay 小品文 (*xiaopinwen*), the essayistic genre most associated today with the *Analects*, is however not treated here.

12 María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, eds., *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 9. My approach to ghost stories is also strongly indebted to Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, which heralded, in literary criticism especially, what has been called a "spectral turn." See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Routledge, 1994). For a critical discussion of hauntology in literary criticism, see also Roger Luckhurst, "The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the 'Spectral Turn'," *Textual Practice* 16.3 (2002): 527-46.

analysis of Yu Dafu's 郁達夫 (1896-1945) call for papers and a *manhua* 漫畫 by Chen Haoxiong 陳浩雄, I will first contextualize some of the anxieties about ghosts as a subject matter many writers expressed within a discourse of national and cultural development and the political crisis on the eve of the Sino-Japanese war as well as retrace Shao's arguments in his two editorials, where he sought to persuade his (modernist) colleagues to nevertheless engage with ghosts. Short readings of four ghost stories will be the focus in the second part. In favor of detailed textual analysis this article aims instead at giving an overview of the *Analects* ghost-story special issues with a special focus on literary writings of "real ghosts" 真鬼 (*zhengui*), i.e. the term Shao uses when he refers to non-figurative ghosts, as I will discuss in further detail below, as a hitherto rarely studied subject matter in modern Chinese literary history.[13] Ultimately, I will argue that debates on ghosts and ghost fiction cannot be understood simply as symptoms of a colonial struggle with a national past, from which a yet to fully modernize nation had to vindicate itself from, but rather offered writers important avenues to articulate contestation and difference within a heavily politicized discourse of culture production.

2. Discussing Ghosts

To write about ghosts was no light matter. In 1934, on the occasion of turning fifty Zhou Zuoren had published two doggerels or "ragged poems" 打油詩, in which he mockingly depicts himself as "half Confucian, half Buddhist," (半是儒家半釋家) who "walks the streets all day listening and talking to ghosts and sits by the window all year round drawing snakes [writing *caozi*]." (街頭終日聽談鬼，窗下通年學畫蛇。)[14] Zhou drew stark criticism from leftist intellectuals, not only for espousing such a world-weary view of the intellectual figure as doing nothing but "playing with collectibles" (玩骨董) and "growing sesame," (種胡麻) but especially for his use of the terms "fox spirits" and "ghosts."[15] Reading the poem alongside Zhou's lecture script "Spirits of the Past" 過去的幽靈 ("Guoqu de youling"), Hu Feng 胡風, Zhou Zuoren's former student, mocks his teacher by posing the rhetorical question: "Aren't the ghosts that Mr. Zhou speaks of and those, that he hears of, not the same ghosts he warned us about in his very own translation [of the Russian writer Vasili Eroshenko's lecture]?" (周先生現在自己所談的鬼，聽人家談的鬼，是不是當年他翻譯的時候叫我們防備的幽靈呢？)[16]

From today's perspective such fervent debates on poetic imagery seem difficult to comprehend. If we accept Mayfair Mei-hui Yang's assertion that the secularization process in China was remarkably violent and totalizing in nature, it would follow equally that during this period clear distinctions between the realms of science and politics, culture and religion could no longer be drawn.[17] The attack on Zhou Zuoren's poems had shown that the general political climate was radicalized to the point that even artistic use of the fantastical was only possible if writers contextualized these "morally dubious" narrative elements within a discourse of cultural development and national pedagogy.[18] The literary critic Liang Shiqiu 梁實秋 satirizes in "Some Remarks on Ghosts in Shakespeare's Works" 略談莎士比亞作品裏的鬼 this politicization of poetics by his radical leftist colleagues by hypothesizing that if Shakespeare were to live in today's China, his dramatic ghosts would not have been allowed on stage.[19]

Ghost-criticism has to be viewed within the larger context of China's new culture movement and its intellectual-elitist enterprise of creating a modern Chinese vernacular fiction. The normative temporalities underlying the reformers' cultural-evolutionary model of civilizational development meant that especially "strange" and fantastical fiction had become a symptom of Chinese culture's "backwardness." Conventional historiography of modern Chinese literature unsurprisingly assumes a gradual triumph of the realist vernacular novel and acknowledges other genres, which in David Der-wei Wang's words were just as vital to the "dissemination of modernity,"[20] if at all, only as literary anachronisms. The main criticisms leftist intellectuals leveled against these "other" literatures — very broadly defined as encompassing both popular fiction written in a classical style as well as vernacular fiction with "fantastic" narrative elements as can be found in works of Eileen Zhang 張

13 Notable studies on ghosts in Chinese fiction include David Der-wei Wang's 王德威 *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg's "Haunted Fiction: Modern Chinese Literature and the Supernatural," *International Fiction Review* 32.1 (January 2005): http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7797/8854. The vast majority of the articles and illustrations discussed in this paper, to my knowledge, have not yet received much scholarly attention, although the ghost-story special issue has not gone completely unnoticed. See for instance Guo Xiaohong 郭曉鴻, "Cong *Lunyu* Gui gushi zhuanhao kan xiandai Zhongguo de wenhua chongtu" 從《論語》鬼故事專號看現代中國的文化沖突 [Cultural Conflicts in the Modern Period as Reflected in the *Analects* Ghost-story special issues]," *Taiyuan Shifan xueyuan xuebao* 3.4 (2004): 65-8. A number of the *Analects* ghost-story special issue texts have been reprinted in Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, ed., *Shen shen gui gui* 神神鬼鬼 [*Deities and Ghosts*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文學出版社, 1992).

14 Zhang Juxiang 張菊香 and Zhang Tierong 張鐵榮, eds., *Zhou Zuoren nianpu* 周作人年譜 [*A Chronical Biography of Zhou Zuoren*], 1st ed. (Tianjin 天津: Tianjin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社, 2000), 440.

15 The repercussions Zhou had to endure after "talking ghosts" would become an important historical precedent for the *Analect* writers, for instance Xu Wugui's 徐無鬼 (an obvious penname I could however not trace to any known author) "Tan gui bian" 談鬼編 ["On Ghost Texts"], in "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 884-6.

16 Hu Feng 胡風, *Hu Feng zawen ji* 胡風雜文集 [*Collection of Hu Feng's Miscellaneous Writings*] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian 三聯書店, 1987), 17-9.

17 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

18 Even acknowledging their "ethnological" worth, had to be carefully contextualized. Zeng Die 曾迭, for instance, states in "*Lüe tan gui gushi*" 略談鬼故事 ["Some Remarks on Ghost Stories"] that May Fourth folklorists wrongfully disclosed ghost stories from their investigations, while immediately afterwards insisting that most ghost stories are "despicable" (極可厭的) and "just like Lady Wang's foot-binding ribbons, a long and foul-smelling evil thing." (像是王大娘的纏腳帶，又長又臭的惡物。) See "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 881.

19 Ibid., 951.

20 David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 22.

愛玲 (1920-1995), Xu Xu, Shi Zhecun and Mu Shiying 穆時英 (1912-1940) — was that they catered to a leisure culture providing readers with escapist fantasies deemed incompatible with their didactic project of creating a national literature. This line of criticism was not entirely justified, not only because of their deliberate misreading of some of the very contemporary topics writers of "low-brow" fiction engaged with, but especially because it presumed that anything that carried elements of "traditional" fiction would be incapable of contributing to the current political crisis China was facing.[21] Underlying such arguments is a notion of modern time, which can only acknowledge that which it cannot explain as causally prior and developmentally inferior to itself, even what was "new" and "modern" at the time. Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879-1942), for instance, noted in his critique of the "*return* to the application of Euro-American theories of the soul [author's emphasis]" (猶復援用歐美人之靈魂說), Spiritist Societies were advocating that nothing was exerting such a detrimental effect on the "heart" of the nation as ghost beliefs.[22] Unwilling to engage with the present's "other" times, past and future, the phantom speaks of, May Fourth iconoclasts eagerly relegated ghosts to a premodern and archaic (Chinese) past. Unsurprisingly then within the period's reform discourse ghostly metaphors of crisis abound such as Hu Shi's 胡適 (1891-1962) "five ghosts" (五鬼) — poverty, disease, ignorance, corruption and disorder.[23] Hu even went so far as to exclaim in defense of his archival research on the Dunhuang 敦煌 manuscripts that "the numerous carnivorous and misguiding ghosts inside this 'rotten pile of paper' are more harmful to humans than Pasteur's bacteria" (「爛紙堆」裏有無數無數的老鬼，能吃人，能迷人，害人的厲害勝過柏斯德發見的種種病菌。) and that "while inserting new knowledge and new [ways of] thinking is necessary, [the task of] extinguishing ghosts is even more pressing." (輸入新知識與新思想固是要緊，然而「打鬼」更是要緊。)[24] Others chimed in on Hu Shi's "anti-ghost" rhetoric. Most notably Zhou Zuoren in his call for a "human(ist) literature," which did not shield him from the criticism he would later on have to endure, but also his brother Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), who towards the end of his life should redeem his favorite hometown ghost of the female hanged 女弔 (*nüdiao*), could not refrain from criticizing classical Chinese literature as portraying nothing but the "optimism of zombies" (殭屍的樂觀).[25]

21 Liu Bannong 劉半農, for instance, believed popular fiction to be incapable of dealing with ideas relatable to social progress and, consequently, that this kind of entertainment fiction would vanish as soon as everybody was able to read "fiction of lofty content", quoted in Chen Pingyuan, "Literature High and Low: 'Popular Fiction' in Twentieth-Century China," in *The Literary Field of 20th-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 117.

22 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, "You gui lun zhiyi" 有鬼論質疑 ["Questions and Doubts Concerning the Existence of Ghosts"], *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [*New Youth*] 4.5 (1918): 408.

23 Also referred to as "five enemies" 五仇敵 (*wu choudi*), Hu Shi, "Women zou na tiao lu" 我們走哪條路 ["Which Path Will We Take?"], in *Hu Shi Quanji* 胡適全集 [*Collected Works of Hu Shi*], vol. 4 (Hefei 合肥: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe 安徽教育出版社, 2003), 461; originally in *Xinyue yuekan* 新月月刊 [*Crescent Monthly*] 2.10 (1930).

24 Hu Shi, "Zhengli guogu 'yu dagui'" 整理國故「與打鬼」 ["The Organization of National Heritage 'and Beating Ghosts'"], *Xiandai pinglun* 現代評論 [*Modern Commentary*] 5.119 (1927): 294.

2.1. Living among Ghosts

Hence, when Yu Dafu on request of Shao Xunmei posted a call for papers for a special issue of the *Analects* on ghost stories in 1936, it comes as no surprise that the majority of contributors expressed a great deal of anxiety about the subject matter or straightforwardly dismissed it as an idle pastime, especially in face of the looming military confrontation with Japan. In contrast to the hesitation many writers stated when writing about ghosts, the sheer quantity of responses Shao received in the wake of the announcement, which allowed him to publish two consecutive special issues instead of the usual single issue, points nevertheless also to the interest ghosts were able to garner. In the editorial of the first following number Shao even states that they had received so many contributions as to fill twenty or more full issues and could have easily turned the *Analects* into a "ghost magazine." (鬼雜誌)[26] Still, many of the contributors begin their essays and stories by justifying their "ghost talk" as an intellectual strategy for circumventing censorship and expressing grievance about the state of the world. The two *loci classici* many authors refer to are Su Dongpo's 蘇東坡 (1037-1101) talks with friends on ghosts after his banishment, and Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) frustration about a failed career in officialdom, which led him to create his famous *zhiguai* collection *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (*Liaozhai's Records of the Strange*). Yu Dafu also refers to these two historical anecdotes and states explicitly that for once the debates will not focus on the existence of ghosts, but rather on the ghostly and the underworld as powerful literary devices in relating to immediate social and political reality. In a satirical hyperbole he demonstrates this approach by drawing a picture of the current world as populated by ghosts, goblins and demons: "Even after Ibsen's death, 'Ghosts'[27] are still rummaging Europe and while Zhong Kui is not fulfilling his duty, do-no-goods are wreaking havoc in China." (況且實際上伊孛生死後，羣鬼還散滿在歐洲。鍾進士入山，小丑仍跳樑在中國。)[28] More specifically, he addresses the

25 Lu Xun, "Qingnian bidu shu" 青年必讀書 ["Necessary Readings for the Youth"], in *Lu Xun Quanji* 魯迅全集 [Collected Works of Lu Xun], 1st ed., vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文學出版社, 2005), 12; originally in *Jingbao fukan* 京報副刊 [*Literary Supplement to Jingbao*], February 21, 1925.

26 Shao Xunmei, "Bianji suibi" 編輯隨筆 ["Editorial"], *Lunyu banyuekan* 93 (1936): 1064. This interest seems to have been so great that Shao the following issue printed a request to contributors to no longer submit any ghost articles. While there is no explicit explanation given, the ghost-story special issues was certainly reflecting poorly on Shao as a person. Shao addresses in the editorial of the following issue the critique that he only conceived of the ghost-story special issues to "forget some sorrow", Ibid., 23.

27 The reference is to Ibsen's also in China widely received play "Ghosts", originally entitled in Norwegian "Gengangere" (Revenants) (1881).

28 Yu Dafu, "'Gui gushi' hao zhengwen qishi"「鬼故事」號徵文啟事 ["Call for Submissions: 'Ghost Stories' Special Issue]," in *Yu Dafu Quanji* 郁達夫全集 [*Complete Works of Yu Dafu*], vol. 11 (Hangzhou 杭州: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe 浙江大學出版社, 2007), 238; originally in *Lunyu banyuekan* 89 (1936). Italics mine. Yu is referring to Henrik Ibsen's (1828-1906) play *Ghosts* (1881), which was then widely received in

colonial context of China's tumultuous political scene through a sarcastic remark on the Republican government's "order to promote friendly relationships with foreign countries" (敦睦邦交令), which had forced China to welcome "green-eyed and red-haired demons" (碧眼紅髮之鬼)[29] from all over the world. Yu reminds potential contributors that to draw on Chinese as well as Western ghost imagery to discuss and critique current events is not only a tried and tested rhetorical strategy of expressing one's thoughts and feelings about the world, but is especially appropriate for such troubled times, in which the imminent Second Sino-Japanese War further fueled an already fervent debate on "National Salvation": "Although metaphysical talk and saving the nation may seem completely unrelated, to stand up and cry out loud is also a sign of a man's [willingness] to take revenge." (雖則玄談與救國，似風馬牛之不相干，但豕立而人啼，亦大復仇之一表現。)[30] By transposing human affairs into the brutal (Chinese) ghost world thus the "true nature" of reality is revealed. Yu's ghosts function (with the exception of Ibsen's *Ghosts*) as metaphors of the untimely, unruly and intrusive. As such, they simultaneously expose some deeper and dark truth as well as raise awareness to the matter. Very much in line with Hu Shi's call to "beat the ghosts," the act of "recognizing" what "they" are therefore already entails the appropriate enlightened response of taking pedagogical, legal and political measures to expel such ghosts forever.

In one of the *manhua* printed in the second special issue the artist Chen Haoxiong offers a visual translation of Yu's approach. In "An X-ray view behind the scene" X光之幕後 (*X-guang zhi muhou*) a skeleton hand pulls back a curtain to reveal a tableau of contemporary China with ghosts and demons at war. [Figure 1] Just like the introscopic, "truth"-exposing technology of the X-ray, Chen draws on a visual rhetoric of skeletons, skulls and graves to lay bare a sinister and corrupt reality. While the ghosts are intended to heighten the sense of brutality and chaos of the reader's view of civil war-ridden China, the position of the reader is through the spatial configuration of the *manhua* as a window or a Western theater space also safely removed from the scene. Furthermore, the image's claim to representational truth is grounded neither in traditional religious iconography nor the historical semiotics of the ghost story, but rather the modern X-ray technology laying bare Chinese reality is given interpretative authority.[31] In a similar figurative manner, the term "living ghosts" 活鬼 is frequently employed in satire or mockery of decadent or morally dubious urban citizens or foreign intruders. Xu Xu's "Ghost play" 鬼戲 is just one of the many texts, where ghosts are only slightly veiled stand-in figures for the Japanese military forces. Likewise, Chinese ghostlore is often translated into a glossary of negative real-world phenomena. Especially the visual representations of ghosts draw on this logic, turning Wu Chang 無常 into an opium addict, female

China. Its original Norwegian title is *Gengangere*, meaning "revenants" in English.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Technological metaphors more generally suggest an epistemological shift in popular understanding of the immaterial world. Wang Xia'an 汪霞庵 in his essay "On Ghosts" 論鬼, for instance, states that "the soul is to humans, what steam is to the train." See "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 893.

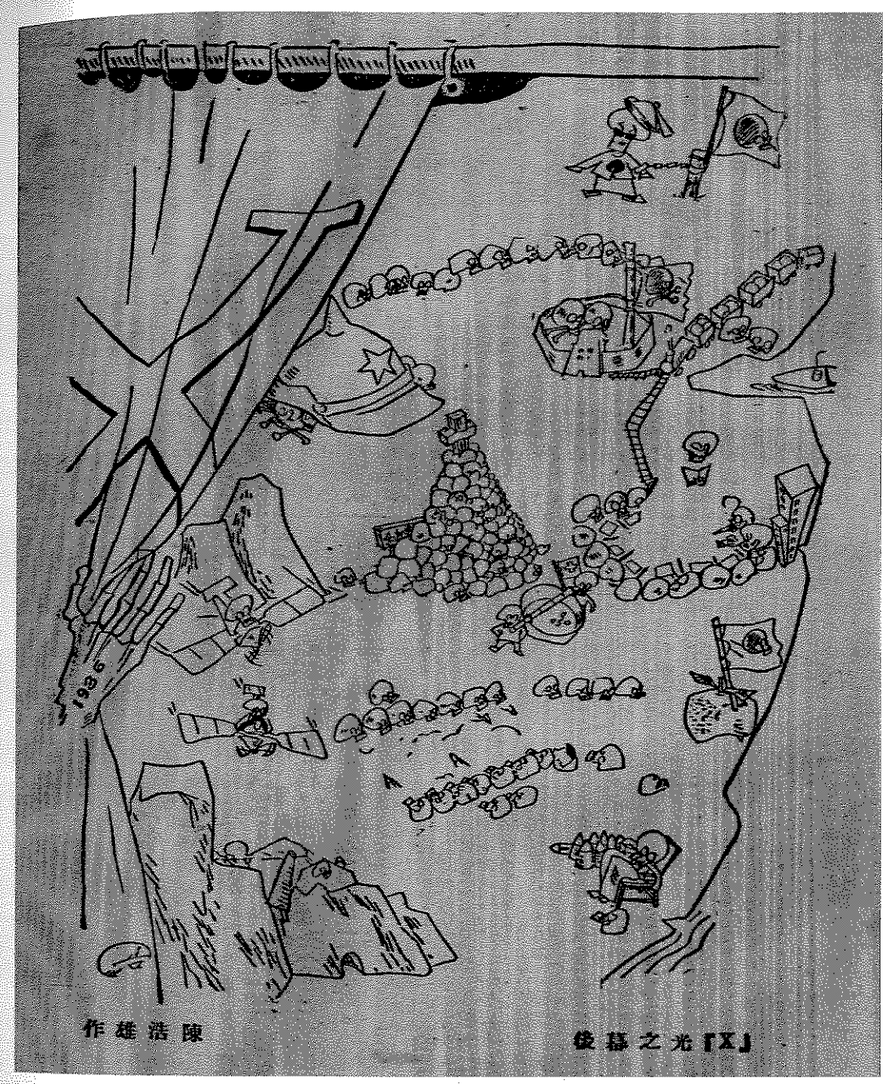

Figure 1: "An X-ray view behind the scene" by Chen Haoxiong, "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 945.

ghosts into courtesans, prostitutes or high-heel wearing women, and *jiangshi* 殭屍 (zombies) into military generals.[32] Such rational explanations were also offered for ghost tales themselves and often an underlying psychological or social "problem" was discerned. While the explanations vary, from Shi Zhecun insisting that all ghost stories are satirical in nature to Cao Juren 曹聚仁 critiquing ghost writers for cloaking their inadequacy to imagine a just government in fantasies of a cruel ghost world, these theories about ghost fiction share the presumption that ghosts as subject matter cannot be taken at face value or are in need of being historicized.[33] The Leftist literary critic Ma Zihua in "Ghosts and the Feminine" 鬼與女性 (*Gui yu nüxing*) formulates this developmentalist critique most clearly when he states that after the complete abolishment of the feudal system future (socialist) society would no longer have any ghost stories to tell.[34]

2.2. Phantom relations

For some authors, however, this historical narrative spanned barely back into their own childhood. Here, a more sympathetic tone permeates. A good example of the very personal relationships modernists expressed through ghosts is Xu Qinwen's 許欽文 account in "The Beautiful Ghost of the Female Hanged" 美麗的弔死鬼 of his fear of the ghost of woman who died during labour as these were mostly likely to take his mother from him. While the lore of the "mother snatching ghost" (舍母鬼) is inextricably tied up with his affective attachment to his mother, within the chronology of the biographical narrative such memories can only be retold in the vocabulary of loss and amnesia,[35] not only of an affective dimension of knowledge and a sense of wonder (this is especially pronounced in Lin Geng's 林庚 "About Ghosts" 說鬼),[36] but also of one's personal history, which suddenly springs from another time. An example of this is Guo Moruo 郭沫若, who writes in his autobiography (referenced by Shao but not included in the two special issues) about the clash between his father's ghost stories and his education in science and, later on, Western medicine. To dismiss his father's stories as psychological hallucinations was for the young Guo a traumatic experience for he was not only losing his father as an authority figure but also disavowing a crucial and beloved part of his childhood.[37] These childhood realms of ghostlore are, because they

32 See Lu Shaofei 魯少飛, "New Guiqutu" 新鬼趣圖 ["Xin Guiqutu"], "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 924; Gao Longsheng 高龍生, "Record of Purity and Ghost Shadows" 津潔鬼影錄 ["Jinjie guiying lu"]), "Gui gushi zhuanhao."

33 Shi Zhecun, "Ghost Talk" 鬼話 ["Guihua"], "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 870; Cao Juren, "A Target on Ghosts" 鬼的箭垛 ["*Gui de jianduo*"], "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 873.

34 Ma Zihua 馬子華, "Ghosts and the Feminine" 鬼與女性 ["Gui yu nüxing"], "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 955-9.

35 Xu Qinwen's 許欽文, "The Beautiful Ghost of the Female Hanged" 美麗的弔死鬼 ["Meili de diaosigui"], "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 963-4.

36 Lin Geng 林庚, "About Ghosts" 說鬼 ["Shuo gui"], "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 901.

37 Guo Moruo郭沫若, "Wo de tongnian" 我的童年 ["My Childhood"], in *Guo Moruo quanji: Wenxue bian* 郭沫若全集：文學編 [*Collected Works of Guo Moruo: Literature Volume*], vol. 11 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1992), 28, 32.

are so personal, deeply fraught with ambivalent sentiments about ghosts as symbols of not only shared histories, literary and cultural heritage, affectionate communal bonds, but also the impact of colonial culture on (China's) "coming-of-age" (the role of Western education is highlighted in Ling Si's 靈絲 "The Different Types of Ghosts" 鬼之種種). Ghost tales seem here the apposite vehicle for registering these feelings of alienation (from one's own culture and family) and dislocation (from the rural), which have been viewed as "a constitutive aspect of our experience of the modern."[38] Certainly, these biographical narratives of becoming-modern mirror China's "coming-of-age" within the temporal framework of a global and homogenous time, where ghosts are allowed to be narrativized only as something from a mythical, remote and irrational (childhood) past. At the same time though, the spectral here also points to an affective dimension in relating to the self and the world in which the borders seperating different times (past, present and future), places (rural and urban) and cultures (East and West) become permeable. "Ghost related things" could give a narrative form to these haunting memories, when everything else had vanished or, as Xu writes, been forgotten.[39] Still, the biographical format of their ghost tales speaks to Xu and Guo's reluctance to allow ghosts into the "adult sphere" of the modern. For Shao, however, relatability was a crucial argument in favor of the ghost story. Advocates of *tongsu wenxue* 通俗文學 frequently accused May Fourth intellectuals of privileging Western literary models and argued that literature, in order to remain relevant, had to be accessible to a wider public. Although elitist in its assumptions about popular "taste," Shao too would take up this line of argumentation: "[...] most of us Chinese grew up listening to ghost stories, which makes it quite impossible for them to sound as foreign and strange as some of the names of the new idols."[40] (我們中國人，大半自小都聽到過鬼故事，所以講來決不會像一般新偶像的名詞那樣陌生刺耳。) Why not write ghost stories then?

3. Theorizing Ghosts

After extensive travels through Europe, Shao Xunmei returned to Shanghai in 1927, where his first collection of poetry *Paradise and May* 天堂與五月 (*Tiantang yu wuyue*) soon took literary circles by storm. While his scandalously decadent poetry was critically acclaimed, his continued fame, rightfully or not, owed not so much to his own literary output — aside from poetry, he wrote a few short novellas — but relied rather on his (purposefully cultivated) notoriety as a dandy and *bon vivant*. But Shao was not only the subject matter of tabloid sensations and scandals — most notably his love affair with American journalist Emily Hahn — but also was one of the most active figures

38 Jo Collins and John Jervis, *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

39 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 963.

40 Ibid., 940.

in Shanghai's literary and publishing scene in the 1930s. It was probably in his work as essayist, editor and translator that Shao excelled the most, albeit more artistically than economically. But as Jonathan Hutt points out, Shao's "singular blend of the traditional and the modern, the foreign and the Chinese, the insular and the cosmopolitan"[41] could not be easily classified within of either leftist or modernist framework, which helps understand why historical judgment on Shao's legacy has been so unfavorable. Already during his lifetime his literary achievements were being forgotten. His tastes were too "Western" and his life's story too connected to the *belle*-époque of Shanghai to make him suitable for the rigid ideological climate that slowly pervaded the cultural scene by the 1940s. Subsequently after 1949, Shao saw his publishing empire and his fortunes crumble. Shunned by the literary establishment and in dire poverty, Shao died with only his son present in 1968 in the garage of one of his former Shanghai estates.

Despite Shao being one of the founding members of the *Analects* and his editorship lasting from 1936 to its end in 1949,[42] the most prominent name attached to the *Analects* today is certainly Lin Yutang 林語堂, who had introduced the concept of "humour" to China.[43] Transliterated by Lin into *youmo* 幽默 in distinction to *huaji* 滑稽 (satire, farce), humour was intended to provide writers weary of the increasing political instrumentalization of art with "an alternative space for social critique."[44] But in his first issue as editor-in-chief, Shao was certainly also eager to give the *Analects* his own trademark style. The special issues under Shao set his brand of the *Analects* most clearly off from Lin Yutang's. While the few special issues Lin had edited had very concrete themes such as "Chinese humour", "Western humour" or "modern education", Shao chose much more broadly suggestive topics such as "family," "light," "addiction," and "escape," the last special issue published on the eve of the Republican army's flight to Taiwan! While Shao continued to emphasize the importance of *youmo* as a concept for the *Analects*, humour was, not only in the ghost-story special issues, increasingly supplanted by his interest in providing writers with a forum for literary creativity, which, as it turned out, was not always successful. In the editorial for the "family" special issue he expresses his despair that a word with so many suggestive connotations had "in nine out of ten articles" (十分之九) been turned into a lamento on the dreariness of family life.[45] From the impressive contributor list, including Zhou Zuoren, Lao She 老舍, Xu Xu, Shi Zhecun, Xu Qinwen, Cao Juren, Feng Zikai 豐子愷, Liang Shiqiu, and many others, we can gather a sense of Shao's intention to make his first issue of the *Analects* a literary event.[46] Shao also points out that nobody had received any remuneration and proudly boasts that everybody had written "exactly what they wanted." (每人都要把每人真要說的話說出來了。)[47]

In both of Shao's editorials of the ghost-story special issues, he discusses more than just the subject matter at hand. There are introductions to writers, comments on editorial decisions such as returning to the use of *fantizi* 繁體字 (long characters) and advertisement for the content of the following issues. The majority of both texts, however, deal with the subject matter of the two special issues. My reading will focus in detail on Shao's line of arguments across both editorials and seek to especially elucidate some of the more subtle implications that Shao makes with regard to the relevance of ghost stories.

In the first editorial, which was, according to Shao, partially a reprint of an earlier article of his on ghost stories, he begins his discussion on ghosts by addressing the secular critique of *mixin* 迷信 (superstition). He was certainly not unsympathetic towards spiritist experiments. He contrasts "the scientifically most developed countries probing into the existence of ghosts" with "the governments of civilized societies [read: China] that forbid the practice of superstition," and subtly mocks: "this is indeed strange." (天下事也真奇怪，一方面文明國家的政府在禁止人民迷信；而另一方面科學最發達的國家卻有許多學者在研究靈魂學[……])[48] However, like Yu Dafu, Shao does not engage with the debates on the scientific proof of the existence of ghosts, and states explicitly that he had not received any articles from "ghost scientists" (有鬼說的科學家), who he mockingly speculates are too busy with the afterlife to deal with worldly affairs.[49] In a more serious tone, Shao displaces the current controversy surrounding ghosts into a more generalized discourse of the "mysterious" 神秘 (*shenmi*): "Everybody has his own family's ghost stories and no matter how much will power one has, there will always be situations, where one is overcome by goose-bump inducing thoughts." (每一個人家都有他家傳的鬼故事；無論是如何意志堅強的人，在某種情景之下，他也免不了有使他毛骨悚然的念頭。)[50] The most important attest to the ghost story's "eternal" relevance, however, is that it pertains to social hierarchies, certainly not exclusive to China: "Every human can become a ghost: For people in despair, this is a solution; for people living

41 Hutt, "Monstre Sacré: The Decadent World of Sinmay Zau."

42 Shao's editorship had a rather long interruption during the war against Japan from 1937 to 1946, when publication was halted. His editorship was partially in collaboration with the journalist and teacher Lin Dazu 林達祖. For a detailed history of the *Analects*, see Li Yingzi 李英姿, *Chuantong Yu Xiandai de Bianzou: "Lunyu" Banyuekan Ji Qi Yanzhong de Minguo* 傳統與現代的變奏：《論語》半月刊及其眼中的民國 [*Variations on Tradition and Modernity: The* Analects *Bimonthly Journal and the Republican Era*] (Jinan 濟南: Qilu shushe 齊魯書社, 2012).

43 For a short history of the 1930s "humour phenomenon" see Diran John Sohigian, "Contagion of Laughter: The Rise of the Humour Phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1930s," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 15.1 (2007): 137-63.

44 Qian Suoqiao, "Discovering Humour in Modern China : The Launching of the Analects Fortnightly Journal and the 'Year of Humour' (1933)," in *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters : Classical and Traditional Approaches*, ed. Jessica Milner Davis and Jocelyn Chey (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 218.

45 Shao Xunmei, "Bianji suibi" 編輯隨筆 ["Editorial"], *Lunyu banyuekan* 100 (1936): 210.

46 The ghost-story special issues became the precedent for accusing Shao of favoring well-known writers over "new talents" and he later on confessed that a close deadline had left him with no other options but to include mainly the solicited articles. Ibid., 210.

47 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 938.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 939.

in comfort, this is frightening." (凡是人都有做鬼的希望：對於生路絕望的人，這是一個解決；對於衣食飽暖的人，這是一個恐怖。)[51] What could be read as a functionalist approach to religious beliefs serves Shao instead as an argument for grounding ghost literature within shared human experience of injustice, fear and redemption. Fully aware of the controversy potentially carried by a special issue on ghost stories, he preemptively counters criticisms by claiming that all literature is in this sense ghost literature: "To say that they [ghosts] are the driving force behind the creation of all art could not be called an exaggerated proposition." (即說牠是一切藝術誕生的動力，也不能說是過於誇張的議論。)[52]

By contextualizing ghosts within universal notions of injustice, fear and mystery, Shao was trying to prevent himself from being accused of "advocating superstition." (提倡迷信)[53] And yet the question remains: why were new ghost stories no longer written? Recalling his excitement when he first heard of Ba Jin's 巴金 (1904-2005) novel *Spirit, Ghost, Human* 神．鬼．人 (*Shen, gui, ren*), Shao expresses his surprise and disappointment that the novel has nothing to do with ghosts at all.[54] Equally, he is dissatisfied with Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 (1892-1978) *post hoc* rationalization of his childhood memories of ghosts. Shao surmises that, while the government's campaign against superstition is likely to be blamed for the phenomenon that men of letters refrain from writing ghost stories, the "dark and secretive shadows" (黑魆魆的影子) could not have evaded the "common people's eyes." (一般人的眼簾)[55] This gap between an elitist concept of modern literature and popular experience of the modern is crucial to Shao's argument. Fondly recalling his childhood memories of listening to his uncle's ghost stories, he proposes a more intuitive rather than rational approach to fiction. However, aside from fleetingly remarking on the current "ghostly direction" (鬼怪的傾向)[56] in world literature and film, it was most importantly his interest in the concept of *tongsu wenxue* that actually inspired Shao to rethink ghost stories. Shao shows little interest though in the actual popular fiction written at his time, in which ghosts were a common staple. Instead he focuses on his fellow "serious writers" and tries to humourously persuade them with the "five advantages" (五易) ghost stories have over "human stories": They are "easy to write," (易寫) "easy to understand," (易懂) "easily incite compassion," (易得同情) "easily succeed," (易成功) and are "easy to remember." (易記)[57] Shao does not offer a clear definition of ghost stories. Most interestingly, he does not count the works of Chinese *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* that feature ghosts as ghost fiction, but calls them myth/fairy tale 神話 (*shenhua*) and satire 諷刺 (*fengci*), because they,

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 940.
55 Ibid., 939.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 940-1.

unlike Western ghost fiction, rarely induce feelings of "horror" or "dread" 恐怖 (*kongbu*). Shao therefore takes greater inspiration from Western rather than Chinese fiction, although he ultimately does not argue for a sinicized version of the gothic tale, but focuses on ghost stories as a uniquely suitable subject matter, rather than a narrative mode, to China's situation:

> The success of a literary work relies heavily on timing and opportunity. Mao Dun became famous, because he wrote *Eclipse* when nobody else was writing long novels. The sales of the *Analects Fortnightly* were high because, at the time, people wanted to speak out, but that was inopportune, so for a while the attitude of putting on a laughing face and crying on the inside flourished. Pearl S. Buck's success owed to the fact that she was writing novels on Chinese topics when the whole world was looking towards China. Rarely the man makes the times, while the times often make the man. This is why the ghost story would easily find success.
>
> (一篇作品受人賞識，時間與環境極有關係。茅盾的得名是因爲他在人家都不寫長篇小說的時候寫了《蝕》；《論語半月刊》的銷行事因爲當時人要說話，而說話不便，於是面裝笑容，淚向心底流的風氣大盛；勃克夫人的成功是因爲她在全世界注意中國之際，採用中國題材來寫了許多小說。英雄雖亦造時勢，但時勢造英雄的例子究竟多。鬼故事容易成功便在此地[……])[58]

While Shao largely keeps with the very general framework I have outlined and concludes his enumeration of the "advantages" by reiterating that "for humankind ghost stories will always hold a special position," (鬼故事因此永遠在人類裏佔有着特殊的位置)[59] his arguments are most intriguing when he tries to connect the "eternal" features of ghost stories to the cultural and political crises of the time. Again the city of Shanghai serves as the model site of the uncanny when he writes that ghost stories would certainly not fail to draw an audience, "because no matter where or when, there is always an eerie atmosphere permeating, be this at noisy opera houses or in crowded dance halls, you will always be able to hear chilly howls of ghosts." (因為無論什麼時間什麼環境總有鬼空散佈着，那怕是熱鬧的戲院，擁擠的舞廳，你也會陰森森地聽見鬼叫。)[60] Here Shao plays with the wide semantic range of the character *gui*, which means not only "ghostly," but also "non-sensical," (as in *guihua* 鬼話 "non-sense talk") "fiend," (as in *jiugui* 酒鬼 "alcoholic") or "foreign" (as in *yanggui* 洋鬼 "foreigner," but most often given as "foreign devil"). Keeping with the comical light-heartedness of the *Analects* Shao constantly shifts between the two ghost modes that he differentiates clearly. There are the "real ghosts" of Chinese and Western ghostlores and there are the "living ghosts" that Yu Dafu had invoked (the opium addicts, the colonialists, etc.). We should be careful not to misunderstand Shao here though. By "realness" Shao does not mean practiced ghost beliefs, from which he distanced himself carefully, but the real emotions and experiences that

58 Ibid., 941.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.

ghost stories are able to convey. Referencing Zhou Zuoren's essay "Fear Heaven Pity Man" 畏天憫人 (*Wei tian min ren*)[61] Shao argues that China has a unique tradition of conceptualizing ghosts within a framework of retribution, which holds that the *yin*-forces of the dead can intervene in the *yang*-world of the living at moments of chaos, corruption and injustice and, equally, the afterworld will punish those who have not answered for their wrong-doings during their lifetime. Even without the cosmological order sustaining these narratives, the ghost story's ability to raise awareness towards inequality and abuse is in Shao's view particularly suitable in a time when "injustices in the world are all too numerous." (我們的世界裏，不平事實在太多了)[62] The May Fourth intellectuals' new literature relating such "injustices" to its readership lacks the imagination that Shao views as the key to a successful piece of fiction. "Real ghosts" offer writers to throw off the shackles of verisimilitude and plunge into the world of free imagination: "To write about real ghosts is easy precisely because they can be freely imagined, even when one takes those living ghosts as reference: [writers] could never lack materials and [their] stories would never be bland." (談起真鬼來便格外容易，你可以憑空虛構，但是也不妨把這些活鬼來做模型：材料決不會貧乏，故事決不會平凡。)[63] Summing up his first editorial he writes:

> I have often said that the first requirement of the novel should be a story, because what everyone after finishing a book remembers forever is the story. [...] Most of the new novels are meaningless essays. I don't understand why one would insist on calling them "novels." If you talk about ghosts you automatically have a "story."
>
> (我常說，小說的第一條件是有故事。因爲每個人看完一本小說的時候，能永久地留在他心裏的是故事。[……] 新小說大半是一篇沒頭沒腦的散文，我不明白爲什麼他們偏要呼牠作「小說」。講起鬼來，你便一定有一個「故事」。)[64]

Shao's insistence on the concept of *gushi*, with the ghost story being its most paradigmatic manifestation, was part of a larger discourse on the relationship between *gushi* and *xiaoshuo*. Shi Zhecun and Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902-1988) were among the notable writers weighing in on this debate, foregrounding *gushi* as not only a prerequisite for a readership, but also an indigenous "Eastern" literary tradition different from the "Western" novel.[65] For Shao the distinction seems to

61 The title given by Shao renders "Shuo wei tian min ren" 說畏天憫人 ("On Fear Heaven Pity Man").

62 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 941.

63 Ibid., 940. This is also a playful spin on the historical proverb from the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 that "to paint ghosts and demons is easy" (畫鬼最易) while visible creatures such as dogs and horses are the most difficult to capture.

64 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 941.

65 For instance Shi Zhecun, "Xiaoshuo zhong de duihua" 小說中的對話 ["Dialogues in Novels"], in *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* 二十世紀中國小說理論資料 [*Theoretical Materials on Chinese Fiction in the Twentieth Century*], eds. Chen Pingyuan et al., vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 1997), 466-71, originally in *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風 [*Cosmic Wind*] 39 (1937). See also footnote 7.

have lain on the one hand in the "transmitability" of a story, and on the other hand, in its ability to provoke emotional responses from its reader. In the second editorial he states:

> From the perspective of a pure literature and art, popular fiction obviously is not desirable, but from the twin perspectives of writers and publishers, popular fiction has its reasons for existing. [...] Certainly, the most important task of popular fiction is to "excite" and to "intoxicate." But I think that no matter how lofty and grand one's ideas are, one cannot go wrong if one starts with what is simple. Only with a readership can a text become effective.
>
> (以純文藝的地位說，同屬小說當然根本要不得的，但是一兩著作界，出版界而言，通俗小說自有它存在的理由。[……]通俗小說的第一個條件當然是「刺激」或「麻醉」。我想無論你的目的與希望是如何的高如何的大，先從淺近處著手是不會錯的。有了讀者，作品方才會發生效力。)[66]

While he reinforces again that he is not interested in a "new popular fiction," (新通俗小說) he proposes to utilize ghosts as one of its "crown jewels," (法寶) precisely to give new literature those affective capabilities regarded as the most deplorable feature of popular fiction. Broadening his perspective once more, Shao goes on to compare Western and Chinese ghost narratives and concludes that ghost stories within the Chinese tradition are "intoxicating" (麻醉) while the ghosts in the Western novel give readers "excitement." (刺激) As a synthesis of these two types of ghost fiction, Shao proposes the term *huangmiu* (荒謬) which he derives from the English literary concept of nonsense:

> Literature of Nonsense (sic) can be translated into "absurd literature." To make sense out of the non-sensical. This is why worldwide non-sensical things and people receive the utmost attention and highest admiration. "Absurd" is colloquially referred to as "literature of reckless talk."
>
> (Literature of Nonsense 可譯作「荒謬文學」。從無意義中得到意義。世上固有無意義事與無意義人得到大家最大的注意與尊敬也。荒謬即熟語所謂「瞎三說四的文學」。)[67]

The list of works he counts as "absurd literature", though, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) and the Ming-dynasty novel *Journey to the West* 西遊記 seem quite unrelated to the ghost fiction that he proposes. And immediately afterwards he goes on to question the usefulness of importing generic labels from the West. This leads to a discussion of the ways in which writers are remembered in China. Quoting at length from an

66 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 1018. Conventionally *mazui* (麻醉) means "numb" or "anaesthetized." In the context of popular fiction, Leftists used *mazui* in the derogatory Marxian sense of "opium for the people." But not only did Shao as a "humourist" oppose such a limited view of popular culture, as he states here quite clearly, but his usage of the term is also often more figurative in the sense of "distracting" or simply "entertaining." By translating *mazui* as "intoxicating" I have tried to honor the semantic range that Shao's use of the term suggests.

67 Ibid.

obituary of Maxim Gorky, Shao quite polemically concludes that Gorky's "affiliation" to a literary school, i.e., social realism, had enticed Chinese critics to shed so many tears over his death, while the passing away of the "unaffiliated" G.K. Chesterton was largely ignored in China. What follows is Shao's obituary to Chesterton, where he acknowledges the influence Chesterton's writings had on the *Analects*. This leads Shao to another dead author, the German cultural historian Oswald Spengler, where he quotes from Will Durant on Spengler's central thesis on the "weakening of the blood" in conjunction with the decline of the arts and China "waiting for Napoleon to appear" in mimicry of the West's development.[68]

What do we make of these writings on the dead? At the beginning of the second editorial Shao discusses yet another strategy of remembering, i.e. a literary prize he and some of his friends wanted to inaugurate in honor of Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, which for no further specified "circumstantial reasons" (環境的關係) had failed to become reality.[69] Intended or not, the thematic connection between the ghost stories, the literary prize and the obituaries is hard to ignore. While it would be difficult to find a common ground among these four authors and thinkers (and Shao also does not imply this), all three genres or commemorative practices share certain generic affinities as they had arisen (or as in the case of Shao's ghost story would arise) within the context of Shanghai's literary and print culture and its new forms of media circulation and readership. Shao himself explicitly points out that the obituary or memorial article (哀启) was a "new format."[70] In light of Shao's ideas on the new ghost story, the thematic connection is, however, even more apparent. Especially the obituary and Shao's ghost story have, at least potentially, the ability to mediate between memories of the past and their (re-)contextualizations in the present that can, in turn, take on important social and political functions. For Shao this means that, just like the newspaper obituary (and certainly also the literary prize) should not be made subservient to the present's political agendas (as Leftists in his view did), but rather the present should honor and pay its debts to a past it may no longer recognize as its own, the ghost story too needs to be conceptualized with this political and moral dimension in mind. Shao surely follows Leftist didacticism to a certain degree, when he goes on to state that the ghost story should be as "exciting" as popular fiction, but "not absurd to the point of making sick." (荒謬不足病)[71] But if the obituary and the literary prize can be read as the ghost story's sibling genres, then to write ghost stories was for Shao not merely a way of capitalizing on the seemingly ubiquitous sentiments of anxiety, disorientation and fear, but a possible mode of responsibly engaging with the more ambivalent experiences of modernization. That Shao in the end implies to offer himself up for the role of China's literary Napoleon turning the tide on a new literature that has lost its course, testifies not only to Shao's here rather pretentious ambition as

68 Ibid., 1019.
69 Ibid., 1017.
70 Ibid., 1019.
71 Ibid., 1018.

Analects editor, but also to his sincere belief in the importance of his ghost story experiment to the future of modern Chinese literature. This is not to suggest that Shao was a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*. He did not believe the text to have any immanent ability for social transformation or resistance to ideologies. Leftists were in his view certainly abusing the obituary to further their political agenda. Rather, texts can only have an impact if they relate to lived experience, have a clearly discernible narrative and, most importantly, engage their readers not in an idealist and abstract manner, but appeal also to their sensual and emotional faculties. In this sense then, for Shao, letting ghosts return to fiction would ensure that the abstract "human(ist)" literature that he loathed would turn into the more humane art of storytelling.

4. Writing Ghosts

To Shao's surprise, the majority of contributions were essays on ghost beliefs and ghost fiction instead of actual ghost stories: "This is for any editor a rare occasion." (這種現象在無論那一個編輯的眼睛裏是少見的。)[72] If we accept his speculation that this had to do with everybody writing "what they really wanted to talk about" (每人都把每人要說的話說出來了)[73] then it follows that most contributors did not want to write ghost stories in Shao's sense, including some of the most well-known and prolific writers such as Shi Zhecun and Lao She. Of the roughly fifty texts included in both issues together, I treat only fifteen as ghost stories proper, leaving also Xu Xu's "Ghost Play" aside. Apart from the texts on childhood ghostlore that I have briefly discussed above, I also exclude from the following discussion those pieces with a more ethnographic approach in writing about, for instance, "types of ghosts." Hereby I follow Shao's distinction of literary and non-literary texts, although it could certainly be argued that, at least in the case of Chinese literature, ghost tales never adhered to any strict boundaries between the fictional and the non-fictional. However, there is a strong difference in intent between texts that seek to creatively engage with ghosts and those that seek to explain ghost beliefs, customs, etc., which makes this distinction both methodologically useful and theoretically productive.

When reading the *Analects* ghost stories, one's first observation is how they differ remarkably from one another, not only in subject matter, but also in literary form ranging from modernist experimental fiction to classical *zhiguai* tales. Again, one recurring topic is the looming military confrontation with Japan as in Lin Nai's 林乃 "Personal account of ghost-watching in the North" 北國觀鬼記, Zhang Kebiao's 章克標 "Ghost Neighbor" 鄰家的鬼 and Qu Jinfeng's 區勁鋒 "Ghost Soldier" 鬼兵, which already point to the proliferation of the term *guizi* 鬼子 as hateful epithet for the Japanese imperial forces during the "War of Resistence."[74] Furthermore, two stories

72 Ibid., 938.
73 Ibid.
74 Already in early records *gui* could refer to "foreign" territories, a meaning which may even predate its later,

are translations, Paul Morand's "Mr. Yu" 余先生 translated by Ye Lingfeng 葉靈鳳, Guy de Maupassant's "The Conservatory" 養花的暖房 translated by Qing Ya 青崖. While Morand's story is about a ghost from the Tang-dynasty seeking to recover his tomb treasures that have become the property of a present-day New York merchant, Maupassant's text recounts how a dull marriage is sexually reinvigorated by the revelation that the eerie and frightening sounds coming from the conservatory outside their house are in fact their maid engaging in a nocturnal relationship. While all of the fifteen stories certainly warrant a detailed analysis, I will focus on four texts that best exemplify the diversity of writings on "real ghosts." Two of them are urban stories: Shao Xunmei's "Hearing Ghosts" 聞鬼 and Lin Weiyin's 林微音 "The Disappearing Hand" 手的消失. The other two, Lu Jun's 陸駿 "Mountain Retreat" 山居 and Bi Shutang's 畢樹堂 "Thus Have I Heard" 如是我聞, are respectively set outside of the city and at the country's periphery.

4.1. Shao Xunmei: Listening to Transgression

For Shao, the city of Shanghai epitomized the modern as a haunted space, and quite literally as a haunted house. While in the poem I quoted initially these darker realms remain only alluded to in the image of the grave site, in "Hearing Ghosts" Shao focuses on the actual haunted nature of city life, and more specifically the houses he used to live in. Technically, Shao's "story" is an account of three instances of "hearing" ghosts, one from his childhood and two very recent. Although these accounts are framed as personal experiences, they also draw on such classical ghost story imagery as candle light turning green indicating a ghostly presence. Given its imitative style of Western gothic narratives with the haunted house as its main trope, Shao's story could be analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective. Such a reading could view the first ghost encounter from Shao's childhood as the child's projection of his family's fears over their crumbling fortunes onto an obtrusive spectral presence. Equally, the second and third haunting of the ghost of the Scottish proprietor's dead son-in-law disturbing Shao's nighttime work could initially be read as a manifestation of the menacing encroachment of foreigners on the city and its inhabitants — a reading that could even be supported by the biography written by Shao's daughter, in which she recounts how the bustling Shao family life with frequent visitors and dinner parties at the Julu 巨鹿 residence was not compatible with their landlords' pedantic cleanliness.[75] But instead of exploring these themes, ghosts in Shao's account end up being not much more than a vehicle to highlight his extravagant self-image by delving into something so forbidden and out-of-fashion as ghosts. This is particularly clear when he goes so far

more frequent use as "ghost" or "devil," see Mu-chou Poo, "The Concept of Ghost in Ancient Chinese Religion," in *Religion and Chinese Society*, ed. John Lagerwey, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004), 173-91. For a detailed discussion of the term *guizi* and Anti-Japanism see Leo Ching, "'Japanese Devils,'" *Cultural Studies* 26.5 (2012): 710-22.

75 Shao Xiaohong 邵綃紅, *Wo de baba Shao Xunmei* 我的爸爸邵洵美 [*My Father Shao Xunmei*] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2005), 100.

as to advertise his own essay collection *A One-man Conversation* 一個人的談話 by highlighting its origins in an eerie encounter with the supernatural. And he ends with the confident remarks: "People have said that these [sounds] were echoes, others insisted that they were 'imagined,' but I, who have personally experienced these situations, can say straightforward and honestly: 'That was a ghost!'" (有人說這是什麼回聲作用，也有人仍舊說是「幻覺」，但是親身經歷了這種情景的我衹會直捷爽快地說：「那是鬼！」)[76]

Shao arguably falls short of his own demand to give his readers a good story, because he does not delve into a fuller exploration of these hauntings. Instead questions of plausibility are foregrounded and he emphasizes how all those people writing and painting ghosts, who nonetheless have never personally seen any spectral appearances, give strong testimony to those believing in the "No-Ghost-Theory." (無鬼論)[77] Too concerned with the image of the ghost-writer, Shao himself truncates the narrative possibilities of ghosts he had so highly praised, and reduces them to a *chiffre* of the marginalized avant-garde intellectual. While it is apparent that he tries to wrest ghosts from the narrow discoursive confines of the no-ghost-theorists and their rational explanation of ghosts as "echoes" or figures of "imagination," he remains unconvincing precisely because he frames his narrative still within this discourse of (dis-)belief. Within such a (mock-)scientific discourse of ghosts, and its occular-centric epistemology, Shao has to resort to aural experiences of the uncanny. The title of Shao's story is very suggestive with the character *wen* (聞) encapsulating the semantic range of different perceptual faculties of smelling, hearing (of), but also (intuitively) knowing, a pun Shao plays on when the house servants' gossip and newspaper reports become the primary source of information on the ghost and the history of Shao's residence. The generative place of these non-visual hauntings are two luxurious estates, which Shao to considerable ironic effect describes in the most objective and quantifiable terms:

> [...] six or seven years ago there was an old Western style mansion on Jing'an Si Lu, that occupied more than seven *mu* [600 m²] of land, with a big field of grass in front of the entrance. The mansion inside had four main rooms and two entrance halls. My bedroom was above the entrance hall to the West and had a balcony five *chi* [30 cm] wide, in front of which there was a big Magnolia tree. Looking through the leaves of the Magnolia tree, one could see a seventeen or eighteen chi long dusty alley, overgrown on both sides by shrubs of holly. At the end of this alley was the main gate, which led to the street. Across from the street was the house of the Yuan family.
>
> (在我六七年靜安寺路上，有一所舊洋式的住宅，佔地七畝餘，門前一大片草地，裏面一共四宅兩進的樓房，靠西的第一進樓上的左廂房便是我的臥室，窗外有五尺闊的洋臺，洋臺外面有棵大玉蘭樹；從這棵玉蘭樹的枝葉間，我們可以看見一條七八十尺的黃沙夾道，兩旁滿栽冬青，夾道盡處便是大門，大門外便是馬路，馬路對面便是一

76 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 923.

77 Ibid., 921.

家姓袁的住宅。)[78]

Overall such meticulous descriptions, which read as a mocking imitation of the evidential writings obsessed with proving the legitimacy of their claims, give us an image of the city as a measurable space with clearly defined compartments assigned to people and their activities. Only in the darkness of the night and with few people or no one around can the phantom's sounds travel freely. The pleasure with which Shao affirms his ghost encounters brings us back to his editorials and his insistence on textual exploration and transgression, not only in the sense of questioning those neatly segregated spatial configurations between rich and poor, foreign and Chinese,[79] but most importantly bursting open those narrowly confined "intellectual spaces" of the modern writer. Viewed in this light, "Hearing Ghosts" is very much in line with his early poetry in that they can both be read as expressions of his wish to pursue the new, the uncharted and the unexpected. If the static and measurable urban space represents the affectlessness and alienation of "human writing", Shao's itinerant ghost sounds penetrating these "solid" structures allegorize the modern as a liberational force in its atomizing thrust. Herein, Shao's ghosts are akin to Walter Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur*, who feels at home in such an ever-changing world and whose aimless drifting seems to always gravitate towards those uncanny elements of the city, where feelings of shock, horror and dread intermingle seamlessly with fascination and pleasure.

4.2. Lu Jun: Old Stories, New Ghosts

A very different story is "Mountain Retreat"[80] by the unknown author Lu Jun, where we move away from the city to a rural setting. In a trope well-known from Shi Zhecun's "Yaksha" 夜叉 (1933), the protagonist is sent on doctor's recommendation to the countryside to recover from an unspecified illness. The story abounds with allusions to classical *zhiguai* and gothic narratives: spider webs, a run-down mansion, a mass grave, a female specter and the accompanying story of cruelty and injustice as well as white smoke and a *jiangshi* 殭屍. In the end the spooky apparition

78 Ibid.

79 Shao and Yu Dafu seemed to have commissioned "Shanghai Ghost Talk — The Ghost King Comes from Shanghai" 上海鬼語——鬼王出在上海 by Xu Weinan 徐蔚南 in fear of not receiving enough "Shanghai ghost stories." Ibid., 899.

80 The title may very well also be a reference to Qu Yuan's 屈原 poem "Mountain Ghost" 山鬼. Shen Congwen also wrote an eponymous story on a madman's life as a mountain recluse: "Mountain Ghost" (1927). This genealogy of spectral woman and men living as mountain recluses, often shunned by society, carried well beyond the 1930s, as evidenced by the *Yangge* opera 秧歌劇 "The White-haired Girl" 白毛女 (1942), produced by the Yan'an Lu Xun Literary Academy of Art 延安魯迅藝術學院. Lu Jun only published this one story in the *Analects* and was most likely an amateur writer without personal ties to the literary establishment or Shao himself, as Shao only refers to him as "Mister Lu Jun" in the editorial. The (pen) name does also not appear in any reference book.

the protagonist witnesses together with the sister of a friend entrusted to him, turns out to be a prank by one of his fellow patients who dressed up in white. Up until this point, however, the reader well versed in the semiotics of the classical ghost story would have assumed the young woman, named Jing Fei 靜斐, to be the dangerous phantom. In fact, the staging of the story as an encounter between the ghostly female beauty and the patient/literati heightens the reader's expectation of romantic events to follow. Most peculiarly, however, no such affairs are even implied. To leave such classical ghost narrative tropes in limbo immediately after their introduction is one of the main characteristics of the story. The mountain sanatorium, equally, built in the shape of a classical Chinese garden "all uneven and crooked," (裏面曲曲折折的)[81] is said to have been erected on the grounds of a mass grave, but again no further historical or otherwise pertinent information is given. These elements in the narrative function to set a "spooky" scene, for the reader as for the characters in the story alike, but are in the end empty signifiers. The only haunted site vaguely explored is a hillside Jing Fei and the narrator "I" come across the night they assume a ghost on their toes. Jing Fei relates the story of a local girl, who was buried there alive by her father after being impregnated out of wedlock. But again, the narrator does not go on to question Jing Fei about the girl's fate, deeming such information irrelevant to their experience of being haunted.

Most visibly different from other *Analects* ghost stories is a strong emphasis on nature as an inhospitable force, which becomes saturated with tropes of spectrality through the protagonist's/narrator's projection of his fears and anxieties. This is particularly apparent in the characterization of Jing Fei. Aside from her morning strolls in the cold, the old estate where she and her sick mother reside is overgrown by moss, shady and cold, and her only real pleasure is to listen to birds chirping in the morning. By contrast, our sickly protagonist, who should have moved into Jing Fei's house but decided that it was too run-down for his liking, oversleeps regularly in the morning and stays in bed dozing well up until the afternoon due to his sensitivity to the summer's heat. While the eerie elements of the narrative are very literally encoded into the landscape, the clinic or sanatorium built in the shape of a Chinese garden only imitates nature. It seems such a place is only able to produce pseudo-hauntings such as dressing-up in white and sneaking up on your friends. By contrast, the urban protagonist experiences his new mountainous habitat early on as "weighing down" his heart. (一個重量推上了我的心頭)[82] If being in nature is the cure to his sickness, then this is a cure that draws on the psycho-mechanics of shock-therapy. In the absence of a functioning approach to ghosts and hauntings, a gendered and spectralized nature has to "shock" the protagonist (and the narrative itself) back into rational coherence. Could all of those terrifying signifiers have amounted to anything else but a silly prank? Arguably the most important episode in the narrative, which leads to the story's haunting climax, is when a group of the protagonist's fellow patients and Jing Fei sit together one evening to tell ghost stories. Instead of being frightened, though, the ghost story leaves

81 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 989.

82 Ibid., 990.

everybody underwhelmed: "[...], then he started to tell a story that seemed like something from a book like *Records on Rainy Nights and under the Autumn Lamp*. After very briefly summarizing the story he was already finished and I listened without the least bit of interest." (便講了一段似乎是夜雨秋燈錄之類書上的故事，極簡短的敍說了一陣就完了，我聽得毫無興味)[83] The intersection of a pathologized landscape and the evacuation of the ghost story's cultural functions, both religious and "literary,"[84] would require a far more detailed analysis than is possible here, and would especially need to take into account both older notions of the "strange" as well as their relation to different concepts of nature. Regarding the proposition of a new Chinese ghost story, however, we can conclude that, as the story ends with neither the protagonist's "health" recovered nor the real injustices such as that of the girl buried alive meaningfully represented, the critical potential of the new ghost story that Shao had argued for seems far out of reach. Suspended between the "non-sense" of ghost impersonation and an unintelligible, spectralized and gendered nature, "Mountain Retreat" suggests the modern ghost story to be as necessary as difficult to write.

4.3. Lin Weiyin: Losing Sight of Human(ity)

Set again in an urban landscape is "The Disappearing Hand" by Lin Weiyin, a lesser known writer associated with the *haipai* 海派 brand of Shanghai modernism. Whereas Shao finds excitement and pleasure in the ghost's sonoric transgression, in Lin's short piece of experimental fiction *flânerie* soon leads to claustrophobia and terror. Opening with a stereotypical setting for a tale of urban horror, the first-person narrator recounts his trip to an unspecified city, where he suddenly finds himself with free time on his hands and decides to "take a stroll through unknown streets." (在不熟悉的街道上隨便走走)[85] In characteristically modernist fashion, every observation is cast with self-doubt, leaving the narrator "I" wondering, for instance, if it was the beginning or the middle of autumn.[86] His interest is suddenly aroused by an unusually narrow alley, which he observes for a while from the outside before he decides to enter. Fascinated by the encroaching walls of this "one-man alley" (單人弄), he contemplates what would happen if someone walked towards him from the other side. His hope to see "how they would mutually hold their breath and how they would shift their bodies" (彼此怎樣地逼著氣，怎樣地側著身走)[87] soon comes true, though in a way different from what he had imagined. The person suddenly moving towards him — "could I

83 Ibid., 991.

84 I am thinking here specifically of the changing contexts and meanings of literary representations of female ghosts that Judith T. Zeitlin analyzes in her erudite study, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

85 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 986.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

really call him a human?" (我可不可以說他是人？)[88] — is perceived as an indistinguishable black mass, from which only the three white dots of the face and the two hands, forming an "equilateral triangle," (等邊三角形) stand out.[89] This presence moves at a steady pace and in unaltered frontal position past the narrator, who remains throughout the story mysteriously invisible to the presence's eyes, which "did not see anything or maybe did not look at anything." (什麼都不看到，或者什麼都不看)[90] The increasingly panic-stricken narrator squeezes himself to the side and dares not move until the apparition is well behind him. At this moment his interest in the mysterious being piques again and he looks back only to see the two hands slowly vanish. Even after returning to the entry point of the alley, he cannot get another glimpse at the pair of hands and concludes that he "up until today does not know if they followed the face or got lost somewhere in the immense black space." (我至今還不知道它們隨了那面孔，那整塊的黑消失到什麼地方去。)[91]

Hands are the most frequently used part of the body for human interaction and symbolic of human sociality and affective bonds. They also recall specifically the X-rayed hand in Chen Haoxiong's *manhua*. As a metonymy for (manual) labour, the hands pulling back the curtain symbolize agency and resolve. Whereas Chen's stripped-down bare-boned hands encode a resolute belief in the ability to overcome China's crisis through the powers of a technologically mediated epistemology of visuality and Enlightenment empiricism, Lin's disappearing hands question the evidentiality of the visual. Can one ever trust what one sees to be true? Could those mysterious eyes without eyebrows even see? From the onset the protagonist has, very literally, a troubled vision: "But after entering, I saw that it was not as dark inside as it had looked from the outside." (而進去了，我看到再裏面並不像從外面所看來似地一些光都沒有)[92] In his famous analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale "The Sand-Man" in *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud analyzes the theme of the eyes and especially losing one's eyes as indicative of the child's castration anxiety.[93] I do not think it is necessary to read castration here in such literal biological terms.[94] Instead, similar to the ghost sounds in Shao's text, loss of sight and distrust in visual perception point figuratively to the fragmentizing, but for Lin also de-humanizing experience of the modern urban space, where one no longer experiences the self as cohesive and autonomous. [Figure 2] An interesting intertext to this is another small *manhua*,

88 Ibid.

89 I have been made aware that this, interestingly, correlates with neuroscientific findings on the predominance of the face and the hands in cortical representations of sensitive body areas. This has been famously visually translated into the figure of a "homunculus", who's hands and head are excessively enlarged in relation to the rest of the body.

90 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 987.

91 Ibid., 987.

92 Ibid., 986.

93 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

94 I eschew here the whole interpretative dimension between the "narrow alley" and the vagina, which Freud viewed as the ultimate *unheimlich* object, once "home" to us all, but now rendered frightening as exemplified in popular folklore such as the Medusa's head, *vagina dentata*.

in which the "eye-less ghost" 無眼鬼 keeps the streets clean of "wronged characters" in a critique of the mutilating results of media censorship, on both textual and corporeal levels. If the X-Ray technology in Chen's *manhua* bespeaks a rational and purposive epistemology of the visual, then the different (in-)visibilities in Lin's text point to the dissolution of certainties and the loss of agency. Interestingly, the narrator uses Chinese opera imagery to characterize such inhuman and uncanny artificiality when he states "... and above the upper lip, where one can grow a beard, it had two pitch black vertical lines, even blacker than the rest of its body, a brow triangle, just like the eyebrows female opera actresses wear on stage." (而在那上唇，那可長鬍髭的上唇，卻倒掛着兩條很黑的，比他身體還黑的，三角的眉毛，像在戲台上花旦所有的那種眉毛。)[95] Although the narrator "I", who doesn't give the reader a single piece of personal information, strives to understand and decode the uncanny appearance, and the references to geometry and Chinese opera certainly point to his desire for a semiotic system capable of rendering his experience intelligible, Lin does not grant him, or the reader for that matter, any facile conclusion as to what has actually happened. If the disembodied and then vanishing hands are read as an allegory of the modern (capitalist) urban space, then neither new science nor tradition as possible alternative value-systems can counteract its dehumanizing (or even mutilating) thrust. On the other hand, Lin's story demonstrates how Shao's ideas on the new ghost story were taken up by writers to explore the "inhuman" as a critical counter-discourse to the "human." In Bi Shutang's story that I now turn to, the spectral-inhuman is taken even further by critically applying the insights from the subterranean/inhuman perspective of those people and ideas disenfranchised by reform ideologies to nationalist narratives of the "people."

4.4. Bi Shutang: Learning from "Real Ghosts"

Set in the remains of what during the Ming dynasty was once an important defensive point of a coastal inlet in the Eastern corner of Shandong province, Bi tells in "Thus Have I Heard" the story of a low-level government official who loses his job after saving a local street peddler selling peanuts from the hands of a brutal police officer.[96] Unable to further support his family, he eventually poisons himself, his wife and children, who then return as vengeful spirits to haunt the police chief and the brutal officer, resulting in the former resigning from his post, and the latter turning into a blind cripple forced into a life of beggary.

Bi is the most straight-forward and unapologetic of all "ghost writers." There is a "Dragon King," 龍王 who incarnates into three government inspectors to lure the police chief into the family's haunted house and Bi gives graphic descriptions of the ghosts' terrifying appearances.

95 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 987.

96 Most likely the story reprinted later as "Mister Cheng" 成先生 in *A Collection of Daydreams* 晝夢集 (1940), which I was, however, not able to verify. The original title *Ru shi wo wen* is most likely also a reference to Ji Yun's 紀昀 eponymous *biji* 筆記 collection from 1791. The author Bi Shutang is today best known for his work as translator of English literature such as Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* 密士失必河上 (1955).

Figure 2: "The Eye-less Ghost", The subhead reads: "This man specializes in collecting the ghosts of wronged characters. All evil needs to be punished and purposefully excised so that it can be handled with one hand alone and there be no delay. (Furthermore, this man [himself] no longer has his eyes and eyebrows, but still goes about his business as usual, which truly is a relief.)" by Yi Wenjie 宜文傑 , "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 876.

Furthermore, a functioning cosmological order ensures that justice is restored. At the end of the story, the people know that the crippled beggar is someone that they, atypical within the religious context of Buddhism, should ignore. Whereas the title of the story is traditionally a very common introductory phrase in Buddhist sutras, collections of didactic aphorisms relating the teachings of Gautama Buddha 釋迦牟尼, such learning in Bi's text is modernized to address issues of rural poverty as well as government negligence and abuse. If it were not for the appearance of the vengeful spirits of the Wang family, the text could very well qualify in style and topic as a social realist novel. The reference to the events unfolding as taking place "now" in the novel, dated precisely to July 1936, give the narrative strong political overtones, although political institutions are still referred to by their old names, as for instance *yamen* (衙門) for "government office". From the late-Qing period to the founding of the PRC in 1949, Shandong was arguably one of the most tumultuous regions in China, especially in the twentieth century as a pawn between different warlords, local political fractions and colonial powers. The police in the narrative is symbolic of these "outside" forces imposing their regulatory regime on local peasants "too poor to produce idlers out of their midst." (地方太窮，養不起閒人)[97] Not only are the peasants obliged to observe the rules (for instance, no gambling), the police is not recognized as belonging to this place with the notable exception of the tragic hero Wang Cheng 王成, "who although he belonged to the *yamen* had become a model member of the community and all the people in the fort respectfully called him Mister Cheng." (雖然算是個衙門中人，卻化成一個鄉黨的模範人物，堡裏的人都尊稱他為成先生)[98] His protest against the beating of the peanut seller Liu Qi 劉七 is then not simply viewed as overstepping his competences, but as an actual threat to this outside order, when he is accused of "taking over the town." (把持鄉黨)[99] In contrast to this oppressive regime, which views the poor peasant as a type of "deviant" at the margins of society in need of regulation and reform, the peasants themselves appear in the most idealized terms as a community with strong values, fostering compassion and generosity. If we read the fort community in "Thus Have I Heard" as a heterotopia in the Foucaultian sense as a place of difference and alterity, then this place functions in two seemingly contradictory ways of laying bare the governmental practices of normalizing peasants into citizens of a nation, subjecting the local to the national, and meanwhile enacting the modern nation's cultural essence through idealized notions of frugality, community and cosmological order, what Homi Bhabha has termed the "double time" in nationalist narratives.[100] The dystopian gives way to the utopian when justice is restored in the end and life goes on as before. In fact, the police chief himself realizes that they will never be able to regulate the community. After a first spooky

97 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 979.

98 Ibid., 975.

99 Ibid., 976.

100 Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291—322.

encounter with the Wang family ghosts, he plays down the episode in front of a group of frightened government officials (who then turn out to be incarnations of the dragon king helping the Wang family): "Although this fort is small, it is quite old and because soldiers are rarely stationed here, it is only normal for ghosts to go about their evil business. Nothing strange about that." (這個圍堡雖小，卻很有了些年歲，平常又沒有多兵鎮壓，不免有鬼魅行兇，卻也不算奇怪)[101] Through the well-known reference to Buddhist sutras in the title, the reader's expectation is set to be given a didactic tale or a moral lesson. Certainly, the immediately apparent teaching seems that the cycles of cosmic retribution serve those who lead a pious life. On the other hand, the story's realism in depicting the bleak and poverty stricken lives of the fort community would render such an interpretation only plausible if we read "Thus Have I Heard" as a satire of traditional morality, which would again be at odds with Bi's direct and sincere prose. In fact, "Thus Have I Heard" distances itself clearly from pedagogical ghost discourses of both religious and secular persuasion, not only through its narrative style and social-realist concern, but also, most importantly, by eschewing any moral commentary on or rational explanation for the ghost's appearances.[102] Bi's novel succeeds thereby in translating most convincingly Shao's notion of "real ghosts" into a successful piece of fiction. Just like the children then, who in Bi Shutang's story remain mute while alive are only as ghosts able to stake their claim to the care and recognition they had been denied, the modern ghost story gains as a "realist" novel its most pronounced contours precisely at the moment when leftist critics were heralding China's ghost-free literary future.

5. Conclusion

Published on the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War, at a time even the renowned writer of gothic inflected fiction Shi Zhecun writes that "the age of realism" (現實主義的時代)[103] had come, the ghost-story special issues of the *Analects* offer insight into some of the ambiguities and difficulties that Chinese writers encountered, in the sense of both becoming-modern and writing "the modern." Contributors of these two issues draw on a wide range of spectral figures, from "traditional" religious ghosts to "modern" hallucinatory ghosts, to problematize these narrations of the self and the nation in the interstices of a heavily normativized discourse of the modern and the more mundane realms of family life, tabloid press, urbanization, migration, etc. Save for ghosts actually taking to the

101 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 980.

102 Contempt for (religious) didacticism seems to have been common among *Analects* writers. Zeng Die, for instance, disdainfully notes that most ghost stories are crafted to "exhort people to pursue the moral good." See, Ibid., 881. And Wang Xiaoshan 王小山 speaks of ghosts in "The Mentality of Ghost Fright" 怕鬼心理 as "religious propaganda." See, Ibid., 905. However, recent scholarship has also shown that ghost tales should not be reduced to their religious and didactic functions, see, Sing-Chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leidne: Brill, 2005), 2.

103 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 870.

planquette boards, writers had to find ways to voice in the "name of ghosts" the dark, forbidden and marginalized topics ghosts as unruly figures could embody. Unsurprisingly, the fate of the ghost writers themselves is one of the most prominent topics, which often precluded deeper investigations into ghost stories themselves. Shao's concept of a new Chinese ghost story, with a cultural political function akin to the public obituary, meanwhile as light-hearted and engaging as "non-sense," proved difficult to grasp. While the traditional ghost story had been discredited as in Lu Jun's story, as a boring and unimaginative pastime, the new ghost story that Shao envisioned was equally difficult to conceptualize and translate into successful fiction at a time of political crisis and cultural turmoil. The fears, anxieties and injustices, that Shao believed the new ghost story capable of addressing, were grounded in a secular and rational present that antagonized ghosts as anachronistic, superstitious and irrational. This tension is palpable in nearly all the texts. Yet two very distinct approaches can be discerned that correspond to Shao's theorization of "living ghosts" and "real ghosts." The majority of texts approach ghosts with a claim to representational authority which metaphorizes and/or historicizes ghosts, often straddling a thin line between political commentary and social satire. By contrast, as Bi Shutang's story demonstrates, the texts that follow Shao's proposition to write "real ghosts," imagine (con-)figurations of hauntings which grant ghosts not only the ability to "intoxicate" readers, but also to pursue their own, perhaps terrifying, modes of self-empowerment. While even a radical secularist such as Ma Zihua read Chinese ghostlore as vivid testimony to China's misogynist culture, he believed himself capable of putting these voices to rest, mimicking the paternalistic reflex directed towards the childhood self in the biographical narrative to speak *for* the ghost, instead of actually "listening to" (Shao) or, as Derrida has famously put it, to learn from the ghost.[104] This is nowhere more visible than in the treatment of the most iconic of literary revenants, the female ghost. Not that the *Analects* issues did not include, in addition to Ma Zihua's essay, a wide range of texts on female hauntings as embodiments of gender injustices or sexually charged phantasies of transgression, but moral pedagogy often foreclosed any consideration of the claim that female modes of haunting could make and how these in turn could contribute to a new literary politics of *gushi*. Even when writing about the terrifying beauty of the ghost of the female hanged, Xu Qinwen too could not help express his "pity" for the women, who were being driven into suicide by their cruel families.[105] The culturally overdetermined female phantom, however, was perhaps also uniquely unsuitable for Shao's ghost story project that focused on the new literary perspectives ghosts were starting to accrue precisely at the moment of being discarded from "human" history. Still, Shao's endeavor to (re-)invent the modern Chinese story through ghosts was, with respect to its capability for literary innovation, too ambitious a task as it found its final limit in the horizon of the radical alterity of female hauntings. It is therefore certainly a noteworthy coincidence that Lu Xun that same year published his famous essay "The Female Hanged" 女弔 (translated by Gladys Yang 戴乃迭 and Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 as "The Hanging Woman") on his vision of a gendered and spectralized ideology of revenge. Written only weeks before his death, Lu Xun, like Xu Qinwen, draws on the operatic figure of the ghost of the female hanged, from the Mulian mystery play 目連戲 to criticize the "bad habit" Chinese ghosts to find substitutes, thereby forgetting to take revenge: "If not for this, we could mix with them quite at our ease."[106] Recognizing Chinese intellectuals' reluctance to engage with ghosts, Lu Xun was certainly right. But those who did get "mixed up" with ghosts, as he himself did, indeed also showed that to write as a "substitute" was an important venue for self-expression and cultural critique. While the *Analects* ghost stories failed to make a profound mark on the course of Chinese literary history, as also evidenced by the virtual anonymity of many writers discussed, Lu Xun's spirited plea for the female specter's revenge appears today only as the prelude to the complicated and contradictory career of the phantom heroine in the cultural politics of twentieth century China, which in the peasant girl turned mountain ghost Xi'er 喜兒 from the propaganda opera *The White-haired Girl* (1942) and the vengeful spirit Li Huiniang 李慧娘 from Meng Chao's 孟超 eponymous *kunqu* 昆曲 opera (1961) found two of its most ambivalent and contested icons. It is in this sense that Shao also underestimated the power of the ghosts that he had conjured, as both "living ghosts" and "real ghosts" would gain central importance to narratives of China's modernization. ※

104 Derrida, *Specters of Marx,* 221.

105 "Gui gushi zhuanhao," 964.

106 Lu Xun, "The Hanging Woman," in *Selected Works of Lu Xun,* trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, 3rd ed. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), 440.